

Chairman and Committee members of the Senate Fish and Game Committee

I hear by voice my support for HB 73

This bill is a small step in the right direction to help alleviate a desperate situation in Western Montana. Yesterday I was out checking my wolf trapline where I have trapped two wolves so far this year which is a time consuming chore that I could not do if I had a forty hour a week job it is not feasible for the average recreationist. My results are meager considering the tracks I saw yesterday of a pack of 5 wolves on a ridge on the east side of the ranch and what appeared to be a couple additional tracks from a separate pack on the north end of the ranch.

This portion of the ranch lies in the Lolo Creek drainage 16 miles west of Lolo Mt. and has been in the family since 1960 it has always had an abundance of wildlife thirty to forty elk year round, half a dozen moose wintered there and whitetail deer have been a constant fixture. Since the wolves have come to the ranch I very rarely see an elk track, I have seen one moose this winter and the whitetail numbers have plummeted.

What was always prime summer pasture for cattle is a danger zone for any livestock producer. When the family raised cattle we would run 100 to 150 pair in the summer. Now it is hard to find any one willing to pasture any cattle on this ground.

Two weeks ago the neighbor on the home ranch within a half mile of Lolo spotted a wolf chasing elk in the pasture where I winter horses. I talked to the ranch hands yesterday on a neighboring ranch where I and my trapping partner have another small trapline they were saying how there is fifty head of elk on the ranch this year as compared to 80 last year and before wolves was always 200 and certain times of the year 400. I could go on for hours on the dire conditions in Western Montana but most of you have heard these truths from your constituents already.

I attended a seminar at the University of Montana this fall which was on the predator prey relationship in Alaska and how it relates to Montana's new wolf population. Dr. Layne Adams a biologist for the USGS service in Alaska was the presenter the biggest statistic I took away from this seminar was that to maintain a wolf population at zero growth you have to reduce the population between 30 and 40 percent every year. And also that to arrive at that goal in Alaska you have to include aerial control because hunting and trapping averages at only 12 percent of the take.

Idaho which is only about 10 miles from my ranch has had much better success in their wolf harvest by implementing tools considered in this bill and tools we need to have. They have used aerial control not just for livestock depredation but as a method to reduce wolf numbers where elk numbers are declining. They have multiple tags, allowed to use snaring which I can attest to would be much more effective than leghold traps because of our weather conditions in Western Montana. A trapping and hunting season which is months longer than Montana's.

So from what is evident to me the passage of HB 73 is a step in the right direction but just the beginning of a process that will involve considerable more effort in the future.

Thank You Mr. Chairman and Committee members for you time.

Paul Rossignol

Lolo Mt.